

The Role of Media in Influencing Policy

*Presenter: Melanie Wakefield, Ph.D., Director, Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer,
The Cancer Council Victoria, and VicHealth Senior Research Fellow, Carlton, Australia*

This paper will examine the extent to which two forms of media—anti-smoking advertising and news coverage on tobacco issues—may influence smoking through both direct and indirect means. These kinds of media can provide new information about smoking directly to audiences and, therefore, can provide direct encouragement, modeling, or reinforcement for not smoking. However, media can also influence smoking by indirect means through changing social norms about tobacco use. To the extent that anti-smoking advertising and/or news coverage on tobacco can increase disapproval of smoking and increase public (and policy-maker) support for tobacco control legislation, passage of other tobacco policies that might themselves influence smoking, such as taxation increases or smoke-free laws, may be enhanced. This paper will present new data on how estimated exposure to televised anti-smoking advertising varies across the United States and is related to social norms about tobacco use. Data also will be presented from the United States and Australia on tobacco issues that get into the news, the extent to which coverage is positive or negative for tobacco control objectives, and how this varies by state. The paper will conclude by discussing the synergies between media and policy in the pursuit of tobacco control progress.